

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge

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REFUGE PLEASED WITH GUILTY PLEA CONCERNING UNAUTHORIZED TIMBER REMOVAL

On Friday, October 6, 2006, the U.S. Attorney for S.C., Reginald Lloyd announced that MARCUS GLEN GASKINS, age 48, of Chesterfield, South Carolina, had pled guilty on October 2, 2006 in federal court in Florence, to causing the unauthorized cutting and removal of timber from federal land, a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1852, and to aiding and abetting, a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2. The unauthorized removal of timber from lands owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) at Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was valued at \$66,740.64. United States Magistrate Judge Thomas E. Rogers, III accepted the plea and will impose sentence after he has reviewed the presentence report. The maximum penalty GASKINS can receive is a fine of up to \$100,000.00 and/or imprisonment for 1 year.

GASKINS, an employee of Canal Wood LLC, brokered an agreement between the USFWS and Canal Wood LLC where the USFWS would pay for an 88-acre tract of land owned by Canal Wood LLC with timber located on the Carolina Sandhills NWR. The agreement between the USFWS and Canal Wood LLC authorized Canal Wood LLC to cut and remove \$132,000.00 worth of timber from the refuge. GASKINS was the Canal Wood LLC employee overseeing the cutting of timber and caused timber worth \$198,740.64 to be cut between March 2004 and December 2005 without notifying the USFWS.

Law enforcement officers from the USFWS investigated this case after the refuge forester noticed discrepancies in the amount of timber cut and invoices submitted by Canal Wood LLC. Upon further investigation, officers determined that GASKINS did not submit several hundred truck scale tickets to the USFWS that documented each load of timber hauled to various timber mills, and continued to allow timber harvest although the contractual obligation for the land purchase had been met.

"We appreciate the support of the US Attorney's office in prosecuting this serious crime. The land and timber belongs to the American people. We trusted Mr. Gaskins to administer the timber contract with honesty and integrity. We are very disappointed that a long-standing relationship and trust has been broken," says Assistant Refuge Manager and Law Enforcement Officer Donald Cockman.

Carolina Sandhills NWR is one of more than 540 national wildlife refuges in the country administered by the USFWS. The USFWS manages the 46,000-acre longleaf pine refuge primarily for the red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally endangered species. Foresters periodically prescribe and permit thinning operations to enhance forest conditions for the rare bird, which prefers open, park-like conditions. The refuge is located in Chesterfield County. The USFWS administers the National Wildlife Refuge System in an effort to conserve, protect and enhance the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for the continuing benefit of the public.

End of Release